

Arab Spring: Interrogating the Dynamics of Popular Uprisings and Democratic Revolutions in North Africa, 2010-2014

Donatus Ajaegbo
Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo

Abstract

The Arab Spring refers to a whole series of violent and non-violent popular uprisings which began in North Africa in 2010 and subsequently spread to the Middle East. Decades of authoritarian regimes in some North African countries, notably Tunisia, Egypt and Libya brought about fragile political stability, economic decline, endemic corruption, abuse of civil liberties, suppression of opposition groups and high rate of unemployment, especially among the youths. The deepening political and economic problems generated popular discontent among the populace and set the stage for an out-break of revolutions. The self-immolation of a young Tunisian unemployed graduate and street hawker whose goods were confiscated by local authorities and who also suffered mistreatment in the hands of security agents ignited a wave of violent protests and civil unrest across North Africa and beyond. This paper addressed the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, where it led to the overthrow or death of their presidents-for-life and set in motion, a democratic transition process. The Arab Spring has demonstrated how the power and the will of the people could change the political landscapes of African states. It is the view of the author that if the Arab Spring could lead to the emergence of responsible, accountable, committed, selfless and focused political leadership in these countries, a solid foundation may have been laid for a new and enduring democratic culture, capable of creating conditions and opportunities necessary for meaningful, genuine, stable and sustainable economic, social and political growth and development in Africa

Keywords: Arab Spring, Revolution, Transition, Dynamics, Uprising

INTRODUCTION

Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Libya are beyond any doubt, the dominant states in Arab North Africa. For many centuries, these countries were under the hegemonic rule of a long succession of alien authorities, notably Persians, the Greeks, Romans and the Ottoman Turks (Hallett,

1980; Folayan, 1977). By 1798, the modern European nations of Britain, France, Italy, Germany and Belgium appeared on the scene and began to show increased interest in the region's economic resources, lucrative trade and strategic position. Through a combination of commercial activities, diplomacy and military expeditions, European explorers, statesmen, soldiers, traders, administrators and scholars began to settle and intervene in the politics and societies of their hosts. By the second half of the 20th century, many of these

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Donatus Ajaegbo, Department of History and Strategic Studies, Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo. Email: donajagbo@gmail.com.

North African states had been conquered, occupied and brought under the European administration. Britain conquered Egypt in 1882. Italy established her authority over Libya in 1932 while France conquered and occupied Algeria in 1860, Tunisia between 1881 and 1883 and Morocco in 1912. Sudan was under Egyptian – British overlordship until 1956.

Historically and linguistically, Arab North African countries are largely Muslims in religion and Arab speaking in language. They also have a long tradition and experience of autocratic rule either by local potentates or alien invaders. A bond of common experience anchored on Islam, Arab language and foreign domination helped to shape the lives of these Arabs. With the influx of European immigrants, alien settlements or communities became prominent features of their cultural landscape. For instance, in 1830, the number of European settlers in North African countries was about 8,200 but in the 1950s, the total European population in the region had risen to over two million (Hallett, 1980). A clash of cultures consequently led to hostile relationships. Foreign domination characterised by land expropriation, a policy of divide and rule, economic exploitation, European claim of political and social superiority, social exclusion, corruption, the intrusion of the Christian missionaries and the dislocation of traditional institutions and values, all combined to provoke intense nationalist sentiments. Resistance to imperialism and pride in their national identities provided a common ground, which united the nationalist politicians and soldiers. Organised resistance to foreign domination culminated in the regaining of nominal and full independence by Egypt in 1922 and 1956, respectively. Libya achieved her independence in 1951, Tunisia, Morocco and the Sudan got theirs in 1956 and Algeria in 1962.

The masses of the independent states of North Africa had hoped that their new leaders would reorganize or reconstruct the political and administrative superstructure established by the colonial authorities, embark upon overall economic reforms and embrace democratic governance. Unfortunately, the situation became worse soon after independence as these states became afflicted with leadership crisis, corruption, high rate of unemployment, mass poverty, denial of civil liberties, political subjugation, ethnic and sectarian hatred and dictatorial tendencies. The substantial and rapid improvement in the living conditions which the masses had hoped to enjoy after independence had given way to a spate of national crises. Disenchanted and disillusioned with these negative and painful developments, the young army officers seized power in a few of these states and began revolutions which not only devoured some of them, but also prepared the ground for the popular uprisings and democratic revolutions which some North African states have witnessed since 2010. In Egypt, for example, the Free Society of Officers forced King Farouk to abdicate his throne. Major General Mohammed Naguib became the president of the new Republic of Egypt proclaimed on June 18, 1953. A year later, Lt Col. Gamal Abdel Nasser ousted Naguib and became the president of Egypt in 1956. At Nasser's death on September 28, 1970, he was succeeded by his Vice-President, Anwar Sadat. Anwar Sadat was assassinated on 6th October 1981 by Muslim extremists and was immediately succeeded by President Hosni Mubarak.

In Tunisia, the nationalist and independent leader, President Habib Bourguiba, was deposed by his Prime Minister Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in 1987. In 1969, Col. Muammar Gaddafi seized power in Libya. Although Algeria, Morocco and the Sudan had also witnessed or experienced spates of political turmoil, wars and frequent

changes of government, the focus of this paper is on Tunisia, Egypt and Libya; the hotbeds of Arab Spring and where mass protests, civil disobedience and civil wars have led to the overthrow, resignation or death of their long-serving presidents.

Political leadership in most post-independent African states is characterised by unbridled corruption, permanent and brazen seizure of state power, manipulation of state institutions and failure to provide people-centered and development-driven governance. The fellowership also lacks the awareness, will, courage and necessary information to reject and flush out autocratic, self-centered and criminal leaders from office. Only when the masses transform their orientation towards political leadership and learn to stand up against dictators will visionary, committed, selfless, responsive and accountable leaders emerge to improve the material lot of their citizens. This paper aims to fill the gap in our knowledge of why and how the citizens of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya successfully revolted against the dictatorship, corruption and denial of the benefits of democracy by their leaders and the efforts of the people to install a people-oriented, humane and development-driven political class argue strongly and favourably for this study. Specifically, the paper argues that driven by economic, social and political grievances as well as patriotic nationalism, African masses like their counterparts in Europe, can bring about fundamental and positive transformation of their countries through violent or peaceful means. Overall, the paper is anchored on three key concepts namely, popular uprising, revolution and democratic revolution. A clarification of these concepts is crucial to a proper analysis and understanding of the focus and import of the paper.

Conceptualising Popular Uprising, Revolution and Democratic Revolution

Popular uprising is a term used to refer to a situation where the citizens of a given country unite or come together to oppose the government in power. Popular uprisings are usually caused by high rates of unemployment, shortages of food and essential commodities, oppressive tendencies of the leadership, industrial and labour actions and perpetuation of the ruling or political class in power. In any popular uprising, the masses or the ordinary citizens predominate, but all social classes and organizations - labour unions, students, traders, civil servants, technicians, drivers, men, women and children-take the centre stage. The primary objective of popular uprisings is to overthrow the existing political order, bring about regime change or force the government to carry out far-reaching reforms. Some popular uprisings degenerate into armed rebellion. In this event, the ruling class, especially in developing societies, tries to contain the uprising with mass arrests, detentions, incarceration, muzzling of the press and brutal killings. Revolution is a sudden, radical or gradual change that occurs in society. The term can be applied to government, agriculture, industry and values. The concept is used in this paper to mean what Huntington (1986:39) referred to as “a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies.” According to Maclean and McMillan (2009:461), it is also “the overthrow of an established order which will involve the transfer of state power from one leadership to another and may involve a radical restructuring of social and economic relations.” Revolution is a phenomenon associated with change and modernization. The causes of a revolution include economic and social adversities, alienation of majority

of the citizens of different social classes from the existing order, clamour for political participation, absence of democratic values, dictatorial regimes and marginalization of majority of the population by the minority, ethnic and sectarian hatred, among others. A revolution becomes more radical with prospects of being successful as more and more different social groups join the process. Finally, revolutions occur to bring about change or reform of the existing political, economic and social institutions. The objective of modern revolutions is to establish democratic states and entrench democratic institutions and values.

Democratic revolutions are intended to overthrow the existing political order and transform the state into a democracy. And a democratic leadership ensures that such fundamental democratic principles and values as majority rule, guarantee of fundamental human rights or protection of civil liberties, free, fair and periodic elections, rule of law, separation of powers etc are entrenched in the constitution and accordingly enforced.

Etymology and Origins of the Arab Spring

The term ‘Arab Spring’ or ‘Arab Awakening’, as probably coined by Marc Lynch in January 2011, refers to a series of non-violent and violent popular uprisings which erupted in North Africa in 2010 (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab-Spring>). These waves of protests, riots, demonstrations and civil wars were patterned after similar popular revolts and civil wars which occurred in Europe and the Middle East between the first half of the 19th century and the last decade of the 20th century. These included the 1820-1848 revolutions in Europe, the ‘Velvet Revolution’ or the ‘Prague Spring’ of 1968 in Czechoslovakia, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the 1989-1991 revolutions in Eastern Europe which led to the break-up of the Soviet

Union (Strayer & Gatzke, 1984; Hunt, Martin, Rosenwein, Hsia & Smith, 2003; Levack, Muir, Maas & Veldman, 2004).

The Arab Spring in North Africa began in Tunisia in the town of Sidi Bouzid on 18th December, 2010. On that fateful day, a young Tunisian graduate and street vendor named Mohammed Bouazizi was arrested and harassed by a municipal inspector for hawking fruits and vegetables with his cart on the streets. As a young unemployed graduate, Bouazizi saw self-employment or job creation as a street hawker as the only way of sustaining his livelihood. While in police detention, Bouazizi was not only manhandled and mistreated by the security agents but his cart and goods were also confiscated. Humiliated by the police and deprived of his wares and cart – his only means of bare survival, Bouazizi soaked himself with fuel and set himself ablaze to protest against police brutality and draw the attention of the government and people of Tunisia to the plight of thousands of unemployed youths in the country. Bouazizi died from the injuries he sustained on 4th January, 2011.

The self-immolation of Bouazizi provoked popular discontent and sparked off massive demonstrations and riots in towns and cities across the country, including the capital, Tunis. The police reacted to the intensity and widespread character of the uprising with savage fury, arresting protesters and activists and shutting down the internet to check advertising the crisis to the outside world (Lynch, 2011). The President of Tunisia, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, took a number of measures to contain the raging crisis. These included a declaration of the state of emergency, dissolution of his government, promise to conduct legislative elections within six months and release of some political prisoners. The actions of Ben Ali, rather than diffusing the situation, ignited more mass and

violent protests, driving the country to the brink of collapse and civil war. As all segments of the society workers, students, activists, women, the youth, political opponents and labour unions – joined the pro-democracy protests in their tens of thousands, the president fled the country on 14th January, 2011 and went into exile in Saudi Arabia. The flight of Ben Ali brought to an inglorious end his twenty-three year dictatorship in Tunisia. Tunisia thus became the first North African state where the Arab Spring led to the overthrow of the President not by a military coup but through popular discontent and uprising.

Following the ousting of President Zine al- Abidine Ben Ali from power, his Prime Minister, Mohammed Ghannouchi briefly took over the mantle of leadership and later handed over to the speaker of parliament, Fouad Mebazaa. To ensure an acceptable transition process, an election for a national constituent assembly was held on October 23, 2011. An alliance of three political parties – Ennahda, Ettakatol and Congress for the Republic (CPR) – known as the troika formed an interim government of National Unity. The National Constituent Assembly, which comprised 217 members wrote a new constitution which was approved and adopted in January 2014. A parliamentary election was held in October 2014. The presidential election, which was held one month later, on November 13, 2014, was the first free and fair election in the country since 1956 when Tunisia regained her independence. In the first round of voting, Beji Caid Essebsi of Nidaa Tounes party and Moncef Marzouki of CPR won 39% and 33% of the popular votes, respectively. Since none of the two candidates won a majority in the first round of voting, a run-off poll took place on 21st December, 2014. Marzouki gained 44.32% of the votes and Essebsi won the election with 55.68% of the votes. The transition to democratic rule in

Tunisia was generally peaceful because the Islamists and secularists chose to reconcile their differences and work together in the interest of the nation. Sadiki (2014) rightly observed that the transition from dictatorship to democratic rule in Tunisia was achieved through constitutional, pluralist and democratic reconstruction. The military also steered clear of politics. This is not to say that post – Ben Ali Tunisia did not experience one sort of crisis or the other. For instance, the assassination of two prominent opposition leaders, Chokri Belaid and Mohammed Brahmi on 6th February, 2013 and 20th July, 2013, respectively, precipitated violent protests and drove the country to the edge of the precipice.

The success of the democratic revolution in Tunisia led to similar protests in the Arab North African country of Egypt. As we pointed out earlier, Hosni Mubarak came to power in 1981; following the assassination of President Anwar Sadat by a Muslim extremist. For over 30 years, Mubarak ruled Egypt with an iron fist. Opposition to his government was suppressed and a few unsuccessful attempts were made to assassinate him. Driven by decades of dictatorship, economic adversities, political turmoil and encouraged by the success of the Tunisian revolution, massive and violent demonstrations broke out in Egypt on 25th January, 2011. The overthrow of the government of Mubarak, the establishment of democratic rule and demand for political and economic reforms were the cardinal objectives of the protesters.

Popular uprisings erupted in the major cities of Egypt such as Cairo, Alexandria and Port Said. The Tahrir Square in Cairo became the epicenter and the rallying point where tens of thousands of disenchanting, disillusioned and divergent groups converged to vent their anger and grievances. Some set up tents at the square while others embarked on sit-ins and

daily demonstrations. Like Ben Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak launched a brutal military crackdown on the protesters which resulted in fatalities. He imposed a curfew which was ignored, blocked access to the internet, dismissed his government and appointed a new cabinet. All the punitive and reconciliatory measures taken by Mubarak to stem the tide of the rebellion failed to achieve any positive results. As the revolution increased in intensity and escalated, Mubarak appointed Omar Suleiman as his Vice-President on 10th February 2011 and ceded all powers to him, hoping to contain the revolution. The appointment of Omar Suleiman as Vice-President and the cession of all powers to him did not help to stem the tide of the rebellion but rather led to its escalation. In the face of escalating bloody protests and increased political turmoil, Hosni Mubarak resigned from office the next day and fled Cairo for the resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh. Scott (2011) affirmed that it was grassroots revolution that terminated the 30-year regime of President Hosni Mubarak.

With the flight of Hosni Mubarak, Vice-President Suleiman handed over power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces of Egypt under the leadership of Field Marshall Hussein Tantawi. To maintain peace, order and stability and restore people's confidence in the government of the country, the military leadership dissolved the parliament, suspended the constitution and lifted the 30-year old state of emergency. A civilian, Essam Sharaf, was appointed the new Prime Minister. Mubarak, his close associates and his sons were put on trial for corruption and killing of a number of demonstrators. A time-table for parliamentary election and constitutional referendum was set. On 19th March, 2011 a constitutional referendum was held while Egypt had its first parliamentary election since 1981 on 28th November, 2011. A post-Mubarak presidential election was held

between May and June 2012. The contest was between Mohammed Morsi of the Freedom and Justice Party of Muslim Brotherhood and Ahmed Shafik, a former Prime Minister under Mubarak. Official results of the election showed that Morsi won 51.7% of the votes as against 48.3% won by Shafik. On 30th June, 2012 Mohammed Morsi was sworn in as the 5th President of Egypt but the first freely and democratically elected president of Arab Republic of Egypt.

On assumption of office, Morsi took a number of presidential actions which brought him into collision course with the army, political opposition and majority of the masses of the country. For instance, Morsi's reconvening of the parliament dissolved by the military leadership, the reorganization of the army leading to the sack of top army officers such as Field Marshall Tantawi, Head of Egyptian Armed Forces and the chiefs of the Army, Airforce and Navy as well as the appointment of General Abdul Fatah al-Sisi as the defence minister only helped to open a Pandora's box of problems from which Morsi would never recover. He aggravated the situation by giving himself unlimited powers, immunized his decrees from legal challenge, ordered the re-trial of Hosni Mubarak and his top aides for their role in killing defenceless protesters. Opposition groups led by Mohammed El-Baradei of the Constitution Party called out tens of thousands of opposition supporters to mount a sustained campaign against the government of Morsi and reject a draft constitution written by Muslim Brotherhood or Islamist dominated members.

Events came to a head on 30th June 2013, on the first anniversary of the election of Morsi, for hundreds of thousands of anti-Morsi protesters came at Tahrir Square to demand the resignation of the president. Thousands of pro-Morsi supporters also

trouped out and occupied Nasr city to defend their first democratically elected civilian president in 30 years. On July 1, 2013, the frequent and violent clashes that ensued between the two antagonists forced the already dissatisfied and alienated military establishment to give the government of Morsi and all political parties a 48-hour ultimatum to resolve the stalemate with the opposition. It was certain that a coup d'état was imminent. On July 3, 2013, General Abdel-Fatah al-Sisi, a man who President Morsi appointed his defence minister, unconstitutionally deposed the President, suspended the constitution and appointed the head of the Supreme Constitutional Court, Adly Mansour, the interim president of Egypt. Mansour was officially sworn in on 4th July 2013. The military overthrow of President Morsi heightened tensions in the country especially between pro and anti-Morsi supporters. These two opposing camps continued to pitch at Tahrir Square and Nasr city, respectively. Frequent and violent clashes between the two rivals and with the security forces left in their trail a tale of injuries, loss of lives and destruction of property.

The toppling of President Morsi raises a number of questions on the role of the military establishment in Egyptian politics. It is incontestable that President Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood helped to precipitate the problems that devoured him. Few months after his assumption of office on 30th June, 2013, the fortunes of Egypt entered a period of steady decline. For instance, the economy fell into a deep recession. There were chronic shortages of fuel, electricity and rising prices of food items and other essential commodities. Tourism and investment, which were vital sources of revenue, dramatically declined. There was a high rate of inflation and unemployment, especially among the youths, was massive. Morsi ran an exclusive government, pursuing only the policies and

programmes of the Freedom and Justice Party, the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood. He also alienated not only the military but also the powerful opposition led by the respected Mohammed El-Barradei, a Nobel laureate and former Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The fact that Morsi reorganized the military and retired some generals, his failure to carry out political and economic reforms, negotiate with the opposition for an inclusive government and run a secular government - all combined not only to polarize the Egyptian society but also generated the popular discontent that forced millions of Egyptians to rise against him. So, the political mistakes of President Morsi provided sufficient reasons for military intervention.

In spite of Morsi's shortcomings, however, the military coup executed against him by General al-Sisi was unconstitutional and a rape of democracy. It is instructive that after thirty years of military dictatorship, the military establishment was very dissatisfied with its confinement to the barracks, with little or no political authority. The Egyptian army is notorious for maintaining and exercising political power and has vested interests in the state economy and politics. For instance, the Egyptian army controls about 40% of the economy and has enormous investments in real estate, tourism, energy, furniture, bottled water, hotels, television and petrol stations, stadiums, restaurant etc. (Sherine Tadros, 2012). Business ventures owned by the military are given preferences in the award of contracts over civilian owned companies. The companies owned by the army are also often given tax exemptions. To all intents and purposes, the Egyptian army is a political party in disguise. In a brazen bid to cling tenaciously to power and maintain their firm grip on the economy, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, with the strong support of the military, not only toppled the first democratically

elected civilian government in Egypt, but also began to unravel his subterranean motives for the coup, some months later.

Although Adly Mansour was appointed the interim president of Egypt after Morsi's removal, General al-Sisi was the *de-facto* president of the country. He directed the state domestic and foreign policies and also represented Egypt in meetings of international organisations and with foreign leaders. He pursued a vendetta against Morsi, his party, top aides and numerous sympathizers or supporters. For example, Mohammed Morsi and his top aides were charged with many crimes against humanity and the state. They were arrested, put on trial and some were either remanded in custody or incarcerated. The crackdown on Morsi supporters had also resulted to over 1500 been killed, especially in the waves of protests that followed in the wake of the removal of Morsi. The Muslim Brotherhood was banned and declared a terrorist organisation. A referendum on a draft constitution was passed by 98% vote on January 18, 2014. Morsi's supporters boycotted the referendum and campaigned against it. On March 26, 2014, al-Sisi retired from the army and declared his presidential ambition. He won the presidential election that was held in May 2014 by a vote of 96.9%. He was sworn in as President of Egypt on 8th June, 2014.

Since al-Sisi's assumption of office in June of 2014, the material lot of the Egyptian population has not significantly improved. Deep divisions still exist in Egyptian society. Popular discontent and waves of protests continue to pervade the political landscape of Egypt. The slogans of bread, freedom, social justice and respect for human dignity or in Arabic term *hurriya, adalah, ijtima'iyah karamah* which popularized, strengthened and sustained the revolution are yet to translate into reality. Armed groups, linked to al-Qaeda,

have emerged especially in the Sinai Peninsula. These terrorist groups constantly carry out bomb attacks on public facilities and assassinations of security forces and top government leaders.

The political and economic fortunes of Egypt were already in decline before Morsi assumed office on 30th June, 2012. After 30 years of military dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak which left a legacy of a bankrupt political system and a battered economy, no leader, no matter how pragmatic and dedicated, could have revamped the Egyptian economy and carry out the necessary political reforms within one year. Lynch rightly warned that the unconstitutional removal of Morsi would not help to successfully address the underlying failures and challenges that bedeviled Egypt's political economy during the 30-year military dictatorship of President Hosni Mubarak and the turbulent transition period leading to Morsi's election. The military intervention was an admission of the failure of Egypt's entire military and political class (Lynch, 2013). In the view of Uche-Okobi (2013:60), the return of the military "casts a shadow over future efforts to fulfill the revolution's promise of a credible...civilian democracy".

The North African country where the Arab spring was most violent, destructive and tragic was Libya. Egypt lies west of Libya while Tunisia, the epicenter of the Arab spring, is at its northernmost part. Popular uprising in Libya which burst open on 17th February 2011 was greatly influenced by the successful democratic revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. The brutal crackdown on protesters by Muammar Gaddafi who ruled the country for 42 years inflamed the protest movement and led to the emergence of factions of radical groups and armed rebels. The eastern city of Benghazi became the flashpoint of the revolution which rapidly

spread to other cities including the capital city of Tripoli. On 26th February 2011, the rebels established the National Transitional Council (NTC) and Mustapha Abdul Jalil, the former Libyan Minister of Justice, was appointed to head the Council. The establishment of the NTC gave the rebels the legitimacy of a broad based opposition movement to Gaddafi overlordship

As the rebellion gained momentum, Gaddafi's government witnessed a number of defections which included diplomats, ministers and most importantly military officers and the rank and file (Spencer, 2011). The savage brutality with which Gaddafi and his eldest son, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi unleashed terror and mayhem on the Libyan people pricked the conscience of the international community. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, the Human Rights Council, France, Britain, the United States and such Arab countries as Saudi Arabia reacted angrily to the horrendous killings and unwanton destructions in Libya. On March 17, 2011, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1973 which authorized a no-fly zone in Libya and the use of "all necessary measures" to protect civilians. Canada, the US and Australia imposed economic sanctions on Libya. To enforce the no-fly zone resolution of the UN, France, Britain and the US launched a massive aerial and naval bombardment of Libyan military defence systems. The incapacitation and degrading of Gaddafi's military machine and recognition of the NTC by the UN and the allied states emboldened the rebels to launch a massive counter military offensive against Gaddafi loyalists from several points. As Gaddafi's forces were routed, many defected while others fled. On 20th October 2011, Muammar Gaddafi himself was captured in his home town of Sirte and executed.

The death of Gaddafi only marked the end of the first phase of the Libyan revolution. Although Gaddafi's chapter had been closed, the NTC continued to contend with pockets of resistance by his die-hard loyalists. The emergence of many political parties and the struggle for political offices were also some of the daunting problems which the NTC had to tackle. To restore the country to democratic rule, parliamentary elections were held on July 2012. On 14th October, 2012, Ali Zeidan was elected Prime Minister of Libya by the General National Congress (GNC) and his cabinet was approved on 31st October 2012 with the full mandate of reconciling opposing political and military interests, restoring peace and order in a devastated country and establishing institutions of government to facilitate and consolidate transition to democracy in Libya.

On 23rd December, 2013, the General National Congress unilaterally voted to extend its tenure, which was to terminate in January 2014, by one year. And when the Congress refused to step down in January 2014, it resulted in widespread protests and riots across Libya. The number of rival militias and armed groups in the country also increased. In February 14, 2014, a former Gaddafi loyalist, retired General Khalifa Haftar, ordered the GNC to dissolve and called for the formation of a caretaker committee which would prepare for new elections. The GNC ignored his order and on May 16, 2014, General Haftar launched a military assault codenamed 'Operation Dignity', against Islamist forces in Benghazi. The Islamist forces themselves launched their own counter military offensive codenamed 'Operation Libya Dawn' on 13th July, 2014 and seized Tripoli International Airport on 23rd August, 2014. Libya had descended into anarchy and civil war. Some Arab states intervened in the war on both sides with air and ground forces. For example, while Qatar backed the Islamist rebel militias

in Tripoli, the United Arab Emirates threw its military strength on the side of General Haftar. Libya has known no peace since the overthrow of Gaddafi. Hundreds of people have lost their lives and over 100,000 persons had been internally displaced. State structures and institutions had collapsed. Libya has become, without doubt, a failed state.

Comparative Analysis of the Nexus between Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan Revolutions

The Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan popular uprisings and democratic revolutions share certain unique characteristics and trends which portray them as fascinating examples or models of 21st century democratic revolutionary movements necessary not only for political, economic and social reforms but also for political stability and good governance in Africa. The three countries have a long history of foreign domination. Each of them also experienced oppressive rule by local potentates. Alien rulers encouraged the migration and settlement of these states by foreign elements. A clash of cultures and local opposition to alien control of their economic resources and political domination provoked intense resentment, opposition, revolt and wars. Centuries of oppressive rule, economic exploitation and dictatorial administration by both foreign and local overlords generated a fiery spirit of nationalism, which culminated in the struggle for and regaining of their lost independence in quick succession. Tunisia shook off French hegemonic rule and achieved independence in 1956. Libya regained her independence in 1951 while Egypt achieved full sovereign and independence status in 1956.

With the departure of the colonial overlords and the achievement of independent and republican status, internal dissensions, corruption, inordinate craze for political leadership and challenge to monarchical traditions and authority led to revolutions by

the army. In Egypt, the 1952 revolution forced King Farouk to abdicate and Egypt became a republic in 1953 with General Muhammad Naguib as its first president. Naguib himself was toppled by General Gamal Abdel Nasser who was in fact the brilliant and nationalist military officer who led the Free Officers Movement to depose King Farouk. In Tunisia, mounting inflation, the rise of religious extremism and the incapacitation of Habib Bourguiba, the first president of independent Tunisia, actuated and impelled General Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali to seize power through what has been labeled the “Jasmine Revolution” or “the medical coup d’etat”. On 1st September 1969, a few military officers commanded by a 27-year old Muammar Gaddafi staged a coup against King Idris I of Libya and launched the Libyan revolution.

Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Ben Ali of Tunisia and Muammar Gaddafi of Libya were all military dictators who for decades violated democratic norms and principles in their countries with impunity. But for the Arab spring that flushed them out of office, each had unilaterally proclaimed himself a life-president of his country. Mubarak was president for over 30 years (6th October 1981 – January 11, 2011). Ben Ali held power for 23 years (7th November 1987 – 14 January 2011) while Muammar Gaddafi was the undisputed leader of Libya for over 42 years (1st September 1969 – 20 October, 2011). The Tunisian revolution of 2011 was a forerunner of the Egyptian and Libyan revolutions. The success of the revolution in Tunisia fired the patriotic and nationalist spirit of the Egyptian and Libyan populations into non-violent and violent opposition.

All the three revolutions followed similar patterns or methods in both planning and execution. These included non-violent and violent demonstrations, strike actions, sit-

ins, civil disobedience and resistance, setting up protest camps, resignations and defections of political office holders and members of the armed forces. The causes of the popular uprisings were corruption, massive unemployment especially among the youths, dictatorial and oppressive administrations, violation of fundamental human rights and denial of civil liberties, inflation and shortage of essential commodities, nepotism and sectarian divide, hatred and tensions.

The revolutions led to loss of lives and destruction of private properties, state infrastructures and institutions on a large scale while many citizens sustained serious injuries. The actual death tolls from the Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan revolutions may be difficult to ascertain. Ajbaili (2011) reported that during the Tunisian political turmoil that toppled Ben Ali, about 300 people were killed and 700 injured. In Libya, it was estimated that around 30,000 people lost their lives, 50,000 were wounded and at least 4,000 people were also missing (Laub, 2011). The Egyptian crisis also claimed over 900 lives.

The revolutions were mass protests which involved all segments of the society – teachers, civil servants, doctors, students, traders, religious leaders, soldiers, artisans, women and children, the aged, labour unions and citizens in the diaspora. In the three states, the despotic leaders used security agents to systematically crackdown opposition protesters. They also blocked access to the internet, and used detentions and incarcerations to stifle opposition and dissent. And when they failed, the revolutions succeeded in flushing out the three dictators and presidents-for-life from their flamboyant and jealously guarded offices.

The effective use of the social media by both professionals and amateurs as well as the wide and steady coverage of events in

these countries by such powerful international television establishments as Al-Jazeera, Cable Network News (CNN) and Press TV contributed immensely in advertising the revolutionary pressures and activities in these Arab countries to the outside world (Cockburn, 2011 & Lynch, 2011). Finally, the cardinal objectives of these revolutions were similar. They included establishment of democratic governments, regime change, protection of civil liberties and fundamental human rights, abolition of presidents-for-life, provision of employment opportunities, running of the inclusive government, the periodic conduct of competitive, free and fair elections, accommodation of opposition groups and political parties as well as carry out overall political, economic and social reforms.

Dissimilarities in the Revolutions

The revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya also differed in some specific respects. In Tunisia, President Ben Ali fled the country to Saudi Arabia, where he was offered political asylum. Although he remains in exile, he was tried in absentia, found guilty and handed a jail sentence. President Hosni Mubarak, his sons and top aides were also put on trial. Mubarak was jailed for life but he remains in Egypt. Unlike Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak, Muammar Gaddafi fiercely and gallantly resisted the rebels or opposition forces, plunged the country into a bloody civil war and was ultimately devoured by the revolution.

Unlike in Tunisia and Egypt, the United Nations (UN) and such powerful democracies as the United States, France and Britain became deeply and actively involved diplomatically, economically and militarily in toppling Muammar Gaddafi of Libya and helping the revolutionary forces to set up institutions and structures necessary for the

restoration of democracy, political stability and good governance in the country.

In Egypt, the unconstitutional overthrow of President Morsi by General al-Sisi and the civil war that broke out in Libya after the eclipse of Gaddafi spiralled the two states into the second phases of their revolutions. In Tunisia, the revolution that led to the removal of Ben Ali was sustained and controlled by the political class and peacefully culminated in a democratic transition process that led to the emergence of Beji Caïd Essebsi as the president of the country. In Egypt and Libya, there was open involvement of the army in the transition process. In Tunisia, the military steered away from the electoral and political transition process and the transition to democratic government was appreciably transparent, free, fair and credible. All the political parties contested the elections on a level playing ground. In Egypt, the military establishment banned the Muslim Brotherhood which was the main opposition party, incarcerated members of the opposition, muzzled the press and installed their own man, General Abdul Fatah Al-Sisi, as president. In Libya, ethnic loyalties, the polarization of the army and actions of external interests led to the emergence of rival militias and parallel governments. A raging civil war and insurgent activities have militated against the establishment of a democratic government in the country.

IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The popular uprisings and democratic revolutions in the Arab North African countries, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya have far-reaching implications for Africa, her political leadership and class structure. The revolutions present a classic and fascinating example of the power of popular discontent and uprising, violent or peaceful, in changing the political

landscapes of African states. The political class that acquires and controls power, either through violent means or democratic process, should realize that power resides with the people and leaders hold it on trust for the people. The ultimate goal of African political class, therefore, should be the firm establishment of democratic institutions, the pursuit of democratic ideals and values and the improvement of the material lot of the citizens. Military leadership, no matter how benevolent, is undemocratic and retrogressive. History has shown that no oppressive or authoritarian regime has ever stifled the will, power, yearnings and aspirations of the people in perpetuity. In addition, African leaders should also put in place robust mechanisms of conflict prevention, management and resolution to enable them stem the tide of popular uprisings and the concomitant crises that follow in their wake. African masses, including workers, traders, educated elite and students, should always stand up against oppressive, sit-tight, inept and corrupt leaders. Only by doing this can the people extricate themselves from the vicious cycle of poverty, underdevelopment and sanguinary conflicts which have bedeviled the continent for decades now.

Out of the three North African states studied by the writer, only in Tunisia has the Arab Spring ushered in an appreciable degree of peaceful democratic transition of power. Democratic institutions are rapidly and firmly being established in the country. The military class has steered away from the politics of Tunisia. On the contrary, Egypt and Libya are still embroiled in political turmoil. The army is still dominant in the politics of these states. The political, economic, social and security problems in these countries are deteriorating while sectarian and ethnic tensions have heightened. Libya is being ravaged by internecine civil war while Al-Sisi of Egypt has re-imposed military dictatorship. All these

pose serious problems for researchers and scholars especially in terms of understanding the full dynamics of the aftermath of the revolutions in these countries. It is hoped that the study will excite the interest of scholars and provoke further research into the crisis of African leadership and development.

CONCLUSION

The Arab Spring began in North Africa and gradually spread to the Middle East. As it spreads, it generates conflicts of dangerous dimensions, including ethnic and sectarian divide and wars. In the opinion of Dabashi, the Arab Spring represents a crescendo of transnational uprisings and a violent rejection of both colonial and postcolonial ideological formations whose impact on national and international politics will continue to reverberate for years and on generations to come. However, it is a sad commentary that most African leaders do not learn from the mistakes of past leaders and thus ignore the valuable and indispensable lessons of history to their own peril. In 21st century Africa, the genuine practice of democratic norms and principles by African leaders is still a mirage. Besides North African countries, authoritarian regimes in other parts of Africa continue to debase their citizens and deny them the enormous benefits of universal human aspirations for freedom, civil liberties and economic opportunities. Self-appointed leaders and presidents-for-life, through various corrupt practices, suppression of opposition and judicial rascality siphon the wealth of their countries and subject their citizens to abject poverty. Inept leadership structures and brazen mismanagement of resources have concomitantly led to endemic corruption, massive unemployment and abject poverty, human rights violations, heinous crimes, decay of social services, terrorism, kidnapping, wars and rumours of wars and

slow pace of development in the continent. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has been in power since 1980 in spite of his age, fragile health, spiral of political unrests and steadily declining economic fortunes of his country. At the age of 89, Mugabe was re-elected and sworn in as President of Zimbabwe, for the 7th term, in 2013.

Undoubtedly, the pillars of democracy include guarantee of basic human rights, majority rule and protection of minority rights, periodic, competitive, free and fair elections, sovereignty of the people, creation of economic and social opportunities, transparency, accountability and due process in the conduct of government business. Others are equality before the law, accommodation of political opposition, appreciation and application of the values of tolerance, dialogue, patience, consensus, compromise and cooperation. If the democratic revolutions in North Africa will genuinely lead to the adoption, practice and sustenance of these essential criteria or tenets of democracy, the transitions to democracy which occur in African countries from time to time may well lay a solid foundation for the emergence of prosperous, stable, progressive and peaceful African states ready to take their pride of place in the comity of nations.

REFERENCES

- Ajbaili, M. (2011). Unofficial says 300 killed during Tunisian uprising, torture still continues. <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/05/22/150022.html>. Retrieved 8th August 2014
- Cockburn, A. (2011). The tweet and revolution. <http://www.counterpunch.org/cockburn02182011.html>. Retrieved 8th September, 2014

- Dabashi, Hamid (2012) Excerpt by Aljazeera from his book *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcoloniality*. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/15/201257103157208253.html>. Retrieved on 20th May, 2015
- Folayan, Kola (1977). *The resistance movement in Libya in Ikime, O. & Osoba, S.O. (eds) Tarikh: European conquest and African resistance (Part I) Vol. 4, No.3 (pp.46-56)*
- Hallett, Robin (1980). *Africa since 1875*. Edinburgh: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Hunt, L., Martin, T.R., Rosenwein, B., Hsia, R.P. & Smith, B.G. (2003). *The making of the west: Peoples and cultures*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins.
- Laub, K. (2011). *Libya: Estimated 30,000 died in war; 4,000 still missing*. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/08/Libya-war-died-n-53456.html>. Retrieved 27th November, 2014
- Levack, B.; Muir, E.; Maas, M. & Veldman, M. (2004). *The West: Encounters & transformers*, Vol. C., New York: Longman.
- Lynch, Marc (2011). *Obama's Arab spring*. <http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/01/06/obamas-arab-spring>. Retrieved 1st March 2013. Retrieved 30 October, 2014
- Lynch, Marc (2013). *Downfall in Cairo*. <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/07/03/morsy-military-coup-egypt-w-obama>. Retrieved 1st July, 2013. Retrieved 20th May, 2015
- Sadiki, Larbi (2014). *Tunisia's Constitution: A Success Story?* <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/01/tunisia-constitution-success-2014121122929203231.html>. Retrieved 20th April, 2015.
- Scott, Peterson (2011). *Egypt's revolution redefines what's possible in the Arab world*. <http://www.esmonitor.com/world/middle-east/2011/Egypt-s-revolution-redefines-what-s-possible-in-the-Arab-world>. Retrieved 1st June, 2013.
- Spencer, Richard (2011). *Libya: Civil war breaks out as Gaddafi mounts rearguard fight*. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindiancean/Libya/834403/Libya-civil-war-breaks-out-as-Gaddafi-mounts-rearguard-fight.html>. Retrieved 27th November, 2014
- Strayer, J.R. & Gatzke, H.W. (1984). *The mainstream of civilization*. Chicago: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc
- Tadros, Sherine (2012). *Egypt's Military Economic Empire*. www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/02/2012215195912519142.html. Retrieved 19th February, 2015.
- Uche-Okobi, J. (2013). *Egypt returns to the brink*. *Tell*, July 15, 2013, No.28.
- Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab-Spring>. Retrieved 8th June 2013.



Dr. Donatus Ifukwu Ajaegbo is a Senior Lecturer and Head of Department of History and Strategic Studies, Federal University, Ndufu-Alike Ikwo, Ebonyi State. He holds a PhD degree in History and International Studies from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Dr. Ajaegbo has published over 30 journal articles and chapters in books on African History and Historical Methods. His teaching and research interests are contemporary political, social and economic issues in Africa.
e-mail: donaaajaegbo@gmail.com.

